

Thinking Processes Impaired by Dementia*

1. **Judgement***: problem solving, consideration of outcomes, consequences & risks
2. **Attention***: ability to stay on task, to concentrate
3. **Perception***: ability to interpret senses (sights, smell, touch, taste, and sounds)
4. **Reasoning***: cause and effect realization, ability to bargain & negotiate, perception or appreciation of levels of danger and risk
5. **Organization***: planning, initiating, following through with an activity
6. **Memory***: ability to store, retain and retrieve information (especially short-term memory)
7. **Communication***: giving and receiving verbal and non-verbal language
8. **Abstract Thinking***: ability to perceive concepts, hold multiple thoughts simultaneously
9. **Orientation to Time and Place**: know current day, date, time, location, purpose
10. **Awareness of Socially Appropriate Norms**: impulse control, respecting others' space, values, etc.
11. **Ability to Filter Emotional Responses**: Use "common sense" or other information to gauge emotional reactions

All of these functions are eventually impaired over the course of Alzheimer's decline. A dementia diagnosis* can be made if the cognitive impairment is occurring in two or more of the above starred areas, and declines are severe enough to cause impairment in social and occupational functioning. Importantly, the decline must represent a decline from a previously higher level of functioning.

Progressive Declines of Alzheimer's Disease & Related Dementia: Physical Changes That Effect Perception of the Environment

Sensory Overload - too much information coming at the person for them to process it and make sense of it – can cause a catastrophic reaction

Out of Sight Out of Mind - things outside the person's visual field are not perceived as present or in the person's awareness

Tunnel Vision – narrowing of the perimeters of the visual field (peripheral vision)

Depth Perception Problems – items that don't have much contrast are perceived as being continuous; patterns or color contrasts are perceived as having different depths even when they don't

Preoccupation with Small/Busy Patterns – small prints may seem to resemble lint or bugs, person may try to remove them from the fabric. Busy patterns can be confusing or cause sensory overload resulting in agitation

Visual Cliffs – dark or black surfaces are perceived as cliffs or holes

Loss of Reading Skills – unable to read sentences first, then eventually words

Visual Cues – when items are in the person's line of sight, they trigger the person's attention, and association with a particular response or activity

Repetitive Themes – subjects or situations that the person tends to return to frequently through questioning, talking about, searching for, or rummaging for, etc. They usually relate to important people, emotionally charged events, fears, occupations, habits/routines or things that provide/provided the person with a sense of security or importance

Heightened Intuition - loss of reasoning ability to navigate the environment leads to higher sensitivity to others' emotions as a survival strategy